

Random Encounters

Dead Guys on Parade

By Dale Donovan



Ghoulish Glee

The attacks by the undead detailed in this series should be challenging and dangerous, but not obviously lethal. The Challenge Ratings of these encounters range from the CR 7 quth-maren upward. Since all these undead beings are intelligent, they do not simply charge the massed PCs the first time they spot the heroes. The undead may track the party for some time, hoping to determine their overall power level, current degree of fitness, and any weaknesses the PCs may have. These undead time their attacks to take advantage of any special abilities they possess, as well as waiting for the party to be weakened from previous encounters. They may also lure a small number of the heroes away from the larger group and into an ambush, or methodically disrupt a spellcasters' attempts to rest and regain spells. Each undead knows that it is outnumbered by the characters, and each one will seek every tactical advantage it can to balance the scales. Consider what it might be like to be pursued by a relentless foe that needs no rest, food, or water to sustain it.



Wary or paranoid PCs should be given normal chances to detect the undead before it strikes at them, but only if the heroes are aware they're being tracked or observed.

The best way to slip this encounter into your campaign is to add the abyssal ghoul to a band of standard ghouls and/or ghosts. When even a mid-level party is swarmed by a bunch of undead with the ability to paralyze their foes so the victims can be eaten at the undead's leisure, the physical differences between the abyssal ghoul and its more common counterparts may go unnoticed for a few critical moments. Then, suddenly, the CR 10 creature is among the PCs, wreaking as much lethal havoc as it can for the master who set it upon the heroes.

Don't spring this encounter on the characters too soon after they meet and defeat the quth-maren, though. Allow some real time and game time to pass before the mastermind loses the next would-be assassin on the heroes.

If the players noted the unusual circumstances or abilities of the quth-maren or the single sentence it spoke to them in the first part of the series, allow them to check around for leads regarding just what the creature was, why it attacked, and who sent it. With suitable research, inquiries, and skill check results, give the players details on the quth-maren itself, perhaps embellished with a healthy dose of legend, rumor, and hyperbole.

If the players took no particular notice of the quth-maren's statement, its abilities, or its rarity (which is assumed for most campaigns), don't worry and don't go out of your way to point out the odd nature of the undead and its stated mission. (It'll be that much more satisfying for you later on when the players finally put all the pieces together and they smack their foreheads when they realize that the quth-maren was the first tool of the master villain.)

You may want to set this encounter on the PCs when they're traveling, especially if it's through strange or unknown territory. The mastermind villain has sent the abyssal ghoul to do what the quth-maren failed to do: Wipe out the heroes. In a dark forest, a remote alpine valley, an abandoned cemetery, a dank swamp, a foreign city's catacombs, or near the ruins of an ancient, perhaps cursed, dungeon, city, or wilderness settlement, the abyssal ghoul waits for the heroes. The abyssal ghoul knows it needs the presence of normal ghouls, ghosts, or other lesser undead with which it can blend or at least be initially mistaken for. The ghoul need not work directly with these other undead, although that's certainly a possibility, especially if the CR 10 creature isn't going to pose a significant threat to the party on its own.

In either case, the PCs should have fought ghouls or similar undead recently and could reasonably expect to do so again in the near future. Aware of this (and actually counting on it), the abyssal ghoul shadows the party as it moves or lurks in the dimmest shadows just beyond the camp's watch fire. The abyssal ghoul hopes to lure overconfident or careless characters into pursuing it, at which time it leads these PCs away from their comrades. After suitable time and distance have elapsed, the abyssal ghoul turns from prey to hunter, attacking the PCs and hoping to overwhelm them as quickly as possible. By the time they notice this creature is no ordinary ghoul, it could be too late.

If this tactic fails, the abyssal ghoul finds a suitable location from which it can launch an ambush that allows it to make use of its sneak attack ability. The most likely target for such an attack is a cleric or

paladin, followed by wizards or sorcerers.

Regardless of how it attacks, when it does so, it utters a single, sinister sentence (if the DM chooses), "I am sent to destroy you, and so you shall die." If the abyssal ghoul is attacking the party on its own, it most likely avoids using its improved grab ability as that would make it too easy a target for the other PCs. The only possible exception to this is if the abyssal ghoul gets a cleric PC alone; then the undead makes every attempt to pin the PC to use its Wisdom drain ability. The abyssal ghoul uses its *deathwatch* ability to monitor any PCs near death. It does it best to finish off any PC close to death's door before turning to face healthier foes. It fights to the death.

If a single abyssal ghoul is not a sufficient challenge to your PCs, have the creature attack alongside the previously mentioned pack of standard ghouls or ghosts or add a second abyssal ghoul to the plan.

Abyssal Ghoul: CR 10; Medium undead (extraplanar); HD 16d12; hp 104; Init +7; Spd 40 ft.; AC 27, touch 13, flat-footed 27; Base Atk +8; Grp +15; Atk +15 melee (2d4+7 plus disease, front claw); Full Atk +15 melee (2d4+7 plus disease, 2 front claws) and +13 melee (2d4+3 plus disease, 2 rear claws); SA disease, improved grab, sneak attack +5d6, Wisdom drain 1d6; SQ blindsight 90 ft., deathwatch, improved uncanny dodge, uncanny dodge, undead traits; AL CE; SV Fort +5, Ref +10, Will +12; Str 25, Dex 16, Con --, Int 14, Wis 15, Cha 18.

Skills and Feats: Balance +20, Climb +20, Hide +20, Jump +23, Move Silently +20, Tumble +20; Dodge, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Mobility, Multiattack, Spring Attack.

Disease (Ex): Any creature hit by an abyssal ghoul's claw attack must succeed on a DC 18 Fort save or contract demon fever (see Table 8-2: Diseases on page 292 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*).

Improved Grab (Ex): If an abyssal ghoul hits a Medium or smaller foe with both front claws, it deals normal damage and attempts to start a grapple as a free action without invoking an attack of opportunity. If it gets a hold, it can attempt to pin and use its Wisdom drain ability on its next grapple check. Each successful grapple check it makes during successive rounds automatically deals damage from both front claws.

Sneak Attack (Ex): Any time an abyssal ghoul's target is denied its Dexterity bonus or when an abyssal ghoul flanks a target, the ghoul deals an additional 5d6 points of damage on a successful melee attack.

Wisdom Drain (Su): If an abyssal ghoul successfully pins a living opponent, it can drain 1d6 points of Wisdom with its smoky tongue on the same action. Each subsequent round that the hold is maintained, the abyssal ghoul automatically drains an additional 1d6 points of Wisdom. A creature reduced to 0 Wisdom by an abyssal ghoul becomes unconscious until at least 1 point of Wisdom is restored.

Blindsight (Ex): An abyssal ghoul is blind, but it maneuvers as well as a sighted creature by using scent and vibration to ascertain its surroundings. This ability enables it to discern objects and creatures within 90 feet. An abyssal ghoul does not normally need to make Spot or Listen checks to notice creatures within range of its blindsight.

Deathwatch (Sp): This ability functions like the *deathwatch* spell, except that it's always active, and an abyssal ghoul always knows how near death all creatures within 90 feet of it are. Because of this, the abyssal ghoul often chooses to kill creatures near death before moving on to attack healthier foes.

Improved Uncanny Dodge: An abyssal ghoul cannot be flanked except by a rogue of 20th level or higher.

Uncanny Dodge (Ex): An abyssal ghoul retains its Dexterity bonus to Armor Class even when flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker.

Undead Traits: An abyssal ghoul is immune to mind-affecting effects, poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and any effect that requires a Fortitude save unless it also works on objects or is harmless. It is not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage to its physical ability scores, ability drain, energy drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or death from massive damage. It cannot be raised, and resurrection works only if it is willing.

Description: An abyssal ghoul resembles a standard ghoul in that it is a warped figure of a humanoid with bestial features. Its skin is scaly and tough, and its fingers and toes end in fearsome claws several inches in length. It also possesses long, sharp teeth and a foot-long tongue that trails in smoky incorporeality at its tip.

Another verbal clue from the latest undead may have the PCs wondering what's going on. You can continue to make things look ominous, but choose your moments, and make them small things. Any paranoid PC in the party is bound to be twitchy to start with, but this can certainly make him or her feel that the worst is yet to come.

Coming in Part 3 of Dead Guys on Parade

Paranoia may have set in for a variety of reasons, but will the PCs be prepared to face a bhut?

[Return to Main Page](#)
